



## City Council

### Waste ReSources Update: Briefing on City Organics and Recycling Programs

**Agenda Date:** 10/2/2018  
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#### **Title**

Waste ReSources Update: Briefing on City Organics and Recycling Programs

#### **Recommended Action**

##### **Committee Recommendation:**

Not referred to a committee.

##### **City Manager Recommendation:**

Receive a briefing from Waste ReSources staff on the City organics and recycling programs.

#### **Report**

##### **Issue:**

Whether to receive a briefing on the City organics and recycling programs.

#### **Staff Contact:**

Gary Franks, Director of Waste ReSources, Public Works Department, 360.753.8780

Ron Jones, Senior Planner, Public Works Waste ReSources, 360.753.8509

#### **Presenter(s):**

Gary Franks, Director of Waste ReSources

Ron Jones, Senior Planner

#### **Background and Analysis:**

##### Briefing on Commercial Organics:

In late April, the City received notice from Thurston County that, as of June 1, they would no longer accept cardboard, waxy cardboard, pizza boxes, compostable bags, compostable products (plates, cups, forks, to go containers), shredded paper, and office paper in its commercial organics collection. Loads containing these materials would be sent to the landfill. These changes are due to restrictions set by Silver Springs Organics, the County's sole organics processor. Previously, Thurston County was hauling commercial loads to a facility in Skagit County that would accept larger quantities of materials listed above.

Although counter to our zero waste vision, the City was left without an option. In response, Waste ReSources staff sent two mailings and emails to customers outlining the changes. They included a

new collection poster and a frequently asked question sheet. To help customers, site visits are available upon request. At the time of the change, the City had 173 commercial organics customers. Since the announced changes, 33 customers have discontinued organics collection and 12 customers have downsized their collection.

Although these changes have been challenging for both customers and staff, we remain committed to the zero waste vision. Staff is focused on education and outreach to help retain existing customers and bring on new customers, as well as working with the County to explore alternative composting options. Based on recent discussions with the County, they are open to discussing the possibility of adding a few items back on the acceptable item list. As always, City staff will continue to monitor the situation closely.

#### Briefing on Residential Recycling:

In July 2017, China's government announced that it would ban 24 recyclables, including "unsorted mixed paper" and "mixed plastics." This ban originates from China's "National Sword" campaign to crackdown on smuggling and contaminated scrap imports. In January 2018, the Chinese government implemented their proposed ban and imposed further restrictions, setting a one-half percent contamination limit for all recyclable imports. This is significantly below typical processing standards of 3 to 5 percent at Washington recycling facilities. These changes have caused major disruptions in recycling markets, causing commodity values to plummet, while hauling and processing costs remain the same.

China has been the largest consumer of North American recyclables. One-third of all scrap material collected in the United States was shipped overseas, with the large majority going to China. Now it is expected that China will stop all waste imports by 2020, if not sooner. While our processor is still finding markets, it is becoming increasingly difficult. Those still accepting material do not have the capacity to absorb what China was handling. Previously, processing and hauling costs were offset by the revenue generated from selling the material. With dwindling markets and commodity values at an all-time low, the future is uncertain.

In order to mitigate the impacts of these falling values and maximize revenue, we must reduce the amount of contamination in each load. Contamination occurs when non-recyclable material ends up in the recycling stream. For example, if plastic bags or lids are mixed with paper, they contaminate the paper and reduce its value. Staff is now conducting "Lid Lifts" on our customer's recycling carts, to help educate customers on approved recyclable materials and improve quality. Drivers are also providing support by identifying and reporting contaminated loads. At this point, no changes have been made to the accepted materials list. In 2019, we will hire a consultant to better understand the financial, environmental, and societal impacts of removing certain products from the recycle stream. For the time being, we will continue to monitor the situation and communicate with our processor to adapt to this evolving situation.

Staff will discuss the impacts of these recent changes to both the recycling and commercial organics programs.

#### **Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):**

All residential customers and those commercial businesses that utilize the City's organics program are affected by recent changes to these programs.

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**Options:**

Briefing only, no action requested at this time.

**Financial Impact:**

Market changes will potentially affect the Waste ReSources budget and customer utility rates for garbage, recycling, and organics.

**Attachments:**

None